

## Acton FinCom Minutes 11/9/04

Members Present: Jonathan Chinitz, Pat Clifford, Pat Easterly, Bob Evans, Gim Hom, Herman Kabakoff, Jon Ryder, David Stone

Minutes of 10/12/04 approved.

Mr. Kabakoff noted that minutes of 10/18/04 should be circulated and approved, even though this brief meeting only reviewed the presentation for the Special Town Meeting.

### Committee Reports

ALG – Mr. Chinitz noted the ongoing discussion of the size and allocation of an override. See the DRAFT ALG minutes circulated previously. Mr. Kabakoff expressed his concern that the ALG discussion seemed to contain a lot of hand-wringing regarding the financial needs of the town and schools, however justified. He felt that FinCom and the other boards should at least explore how the Town and Schools would operate within the constraints of Prop 2 ½ in the event that is what the voters desire. Dr. Evans said it will be helpful if the ALG can present to the State of the Town meeting what problems Acton is facing, either unique to Acton or similar to those faced by other towns. Mr. Chinitz noted that we are somewhat constrained by collective bargaining laws regarding what we can say regarding future employment costs. He also said that he plans to prepare an analysis of how Acton compares with other towns.

BOS – Mr. Kabakoff reported on the meeting of 11/1, which included an analysis of the fiscal impacts of the Woodlands at Laurel Hill 40B project in the Nagog area. There was also some discussion of potential CPA projects, including restoration of antique fire engines and other historical artifacts. Mr. Kabakoff noted that the Morrison Farm committee does not include FinCom representatives and felt that it should. Mr. Chinitz agreed to follow up with the Selectmen. The Quarry Sculpture Park committee was assembled and the Peets have agreed to work with this committee. There was a lot of discussion about the Bruce Freeman rail trail, including support of a \$75,000 funding request to the CPC for engineering studies. The Governor vetoed our home rule petition regarding informing voters regarding ballot actions.

CPC – Jon Ryder noted that proposals are due to the CPC on November 12, 2004. He will circulate those that come forward to the FinCom so that we can consider our recommendations regarding those that are approved by the CPC. He expects the CPC to meet with FinCom some time in January.

Health Insurance Trust – Jon Ryder said that work continues to resolve a discrepancy between cash and accrual accounting for the trust. The trustees are still recommending that the town and schools use a 12% cost increase figure for next year. Efforts continue to find a more cost effective alternative for our retirees.

School Building Projects – Dr Evans noted that the Junior High School project has been signed off with the contractor. Work on the HVAC system at the High School continues. Certain wiring studies remain to be done in order to improve the electrical distribution system on the campus.

The schools own the wiring and poles on the campus. The committee meets again on 11/16. Ms. Clifford asked whether the High School Project would be complete on 11/15/04, as scheduled. Mr. Evans said yes, although some “punch list” items will remain, including work on the grass in the spring.

School Committee – Pat Easterly reported that the committee was focused on what materials to present to the State of the Town meeting. There was also discussion of the ALG meeting and what override amounts to pursue. It was Junior High Night, so the Principal and PTO spoke. The Principal would like to add another 7<sup>th</sup> grade team, and some new textbooks. He also listed some capital needs, such as soundproofing in the cafeteria. The school committee accepted a donation of \$70,000 from Friends of Leary Field to support a study on what would be required to install artificial turf. Mr. Hom notes that the schools did receive another “Pothole” grant of \$60,000 based on increased enrollment.

Life After NESWC – Mr. Stone explained that the committee is awaiting responses to the RFPs.

ACHC – Pat Clifford attended a meeting regarding a small 40B project on Sylvia Street in South Acton. The neighbors were strongly opposed to the initial plan, which called for eight units. In light of this opposition, the ACHC and the developer are now discussing a six unit plan under the affordable housing overlay district, which would allow the project to be controlled by local zoning. The same developers are working on an eight unit project off River Street.

Public Safety Building – Mr. Chinitz noted that the project remains on track, although the committee hasn’t met since our last meeting.

State of the Town meeting materials – Mr. Chinitz reviewed the plan for the meeting, in which the boards will be encouraged to talk less or not at all and presentations will be kept to a minimum. The idea is to encourage as much discussion as possible. Mr. Stone circulated the analysis that he presented back in February regarding per capita spending on education and all other expenses. Mr. Chinitz described the analyses that he is working on comparing Acton to neighboring towns and to a set of similarly situated towns around the state. He noted some anecdotal results on, for example, the increase in single family tax bills over the last 15 years, where Acton’s 120% increase is about in the middle of the peer group. The increase in Acton’s average single family home value of 80% is below about two thirds of the towns in the peer group. He also illustrated the impact of some potential override numbers. For example, if we approved a \$4M override next year and did nothing else for the next four years, the average tax bill would increase 23% by FY2010.

Pyramid Overrides – Gim Hom gave a presentation on pyramid and menu overrides. He urged the FinCom to consider these alternatives to a single override. In a pyramid override, the voters are asked to vote on each of several increasing levels of override. If more than one is approved, the one with the highest dollar amount prevails. He gave an example from the Town of Concord in 2002, and others from Needham and Belmont. He explained that in a menu override, each question concerns funding for a different purpose. Mr. Hom does not feel strongly that we should pursue this type of override, but he encouraged the committee to consider the option. FinCom members agreed that it was worth further discussion at a subsequent meeting.

Nagog 40B Project ZBA Meeting – Mr. Chinitz noted that this is only the second ZBA meeting he has ever attended. This one was very well attended. His only observations were that the most of the early part of the meeting was spent on formalities, such as coordinating between the Acton and Westford timelines for review. The other item of note was a presentation by the consultant representing the developer; it was essentially the same presentation that he gave to us a few months ago. Mr. Kabakoff and Mr. Ryder expressed their concerns about the impact of the project on both the schools and other town services. Pat Easterly reported on her efforts to update the prior study on the impact of new building projects on schools.